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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: AFGHANISTAN-CIVILIANS,
AFGHANISTAN-NETHERLANDS, AFGHANISTAN-NATO, TURKEY, DUBAI;BERLIN

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[1](#)1. Lead Stories Summary

Two stories dominate in this morning's print media: the suspension of the strike by Lufthansa pilots and the sponsoring affair of the CDU in North Rhine-Westphalia. Editorials focused on the Lufthansa strike and the dismissal of the secretary general of the CDU in North Rhine-Westphalia. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with a story on the suspension of the Lufthansa strike.

[1](#)2. (Afghanistan) Civilian Casualties

Financial Times Deutschland (2/23) headlined: "NATO is Bombing its Own Afghanistan Strategy" and reported that "According to Afghan government sources, 27 civilians, among them four women and a child, were killed during an air strike by U.S. helicopters. It was the worst misguided strike since the devastating air strike near Kunduz on September 4.... NATO Supreme Commander Stanley McChrystal expressed his 'apologies and regret at the tragic incident' and ordered an investigation. Over the past few months, McChrystal tried to change operation rules to prevent inadvertent air strikes on civilians. Since the beginning of the large-scale 'Mushtarak' offensive...more than 50 civilians have died. Doubts are now growing that NATO is serious about its attempt to avoid civilian casualties in its operations."

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/23) carried a report, headlined: "In the Shadow of Bad News," and wrote: "Since the beginning of the offensive in Helmand Province, there have been increasing reports about civilian victims. Not all of the victims are linked to the

offensive but they are jeopardizing the hoped-for new beginning. The commander of the ISAF promised on Monday that one would intensify efforts to avoid the killing of civilians. In a sad way, this statement sounds familiar. For months, ISAF commander McChrystal has been apologizing for the mistakes of his soldiers. On Sunday, it was 30 civilians whose cars became the target of an air strike by ISAF." Berliner Zeitung (2/23) reported under the headline: "Collateral Damage with 27 Civilians."

In an editorial Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/23) judged: "It is right that each victim of a misguided missile is one victim too many, because such victims undermine the Afghans' confidence in ISAF and produce new recruits for the militant Islamists. The conclusion is that the Taliban, who are pleased at this recruitment mechanism, will do everything so that NATO is unable to distinguish between fighters and civilians. That is why it is also clear that ISAF commander McChrystal is in a dilemma. In August 2009, he issued orders to avoid civilian victims at any cost. But at the same time, he is waging an asymmetric war in which the opponent has no scruples taking civilians hostage. If it is NATO's supreme goal to avoid civilian victims, then it cannot fight this war."

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/23) opined under the headline: "The bombing of Civilians Demonstrates that NATO is its Own Enemy in Afghanistan." and judged: "The Taliban will be in business as long as they are able to promise successes. Afghans have been opportunists for a long time; and this is not meant in a disparaging way. The experience of years of war has taught them that the chance to survive will increase on the side of the stronger force. But if the Taliban are weakened, then they will be unable to offer

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protection or to threaten others. It is a mystery why NATO continues to ignore these principles of life in Afghanistan.... The offensive in the South is justified because ISAF forces will now occupy a territory that the Taliban have thus far controlled. Air strikes are always risky because a reasonable reconnaissance on the ground is difficult. That is why air strikes have become a symbol of arbitrariness and a blind exercise of power. It is a sign that the strangers do not want to deal with the situation on the ground. No air strike has ever resulted in the Taliban giving up territory. Security in Afghanistan does not come from aircraft."

Under the headline: "Dangerous Offensive in Afghanistan," Berliner Zeitung (2/23) editorialized: "The original plan of the offensive against the Taliban in Helmand Province is not bearing fruit right now. ISAF had planned to expel the Taliban in fights on the ground and then reconstruct the country together with the civilian population. But with every civilian casualty the support among the Afghans for the allied operation will continue to decline. This is fatal since the offensive has the right goals. If the allies fail in Helmand in such a blatant way as before, they can forget all their nice plans for reconstruction, police training, and education projects"

13. (Afghanistan) Fears of Dutch Domino Effect

Under the headline: "NATO Seeking Replacement For Dutch - Total Dutch Withdrawal Caught NATO Unawares" FT Deutschland (2/23) wrote: "The collapse of the governing coalition in The Hague is causing problems for NATO that are hard to resolve. A NATO spokesman described the Dutch government's decision to totally withdraw its forces from Afghanistan as a 'crucial break.' It is still totally unclear how the almost 2,000 Dutch soldiers can be replaced in disputed territories. It is likely that it will be one of the most difficult tasks for NATO to find a replacement for the Dutch because the situation in Uruzgan is tense and dangerous."

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/23) reported: "Thus far, there is no one in sight who could replace the Dutch contingent; the Australians who are also deployed in Uruzgan Province, thwarted such hopes over the weekend. Observers are now expecting the United States to jump in again. And this could threaten the fragile quiet in Uruzgan because this is the result of the 'Dutch approach' which aims at finding an accommodation with all sides. But NATO is also worried about the political echo of the Dutch debate. The possible withdrawal of one

of its most important troop contributors could also initiate similar considerations in other countries."

Under the headline: "ISAF Is Afraid of a Disintegration of Forces," Handelsblatt (2/23) wrote: "The likely Dutch withdrawal will weaken the Afghanistan force. Will other allies now follow The Hague's example? Australia's Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said that his forces "are unable to take over the leadership" in Uruzgan Province once the Dutch have withdrawn. This means that the Bundeswehr could face new demands, i.e. that the Bundeswehr could increase its engagement also outside of its relatively quiet operation area in northern Afghanistan."

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/23) reported under the headline: "Successful Warriors," that "the Dutch forces in Afghanistan have more or less created peace in its territory - its withdrawal will now hit NATO hard. The Taliban are likely to consider the Dutch withdrawal as their victory."

14. (Afghanistan) German, NATO Role

According to an editorial in Stuttgarter Nachrichten (2/23), "the impression is consolidating in Germany and in other European countries that the main issue in Afghanistan is to show loyalty to

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the United States. Only in order to make it possible for President Obama to save face and to end the war some day in the future, additional soldiers with additional secret missions must now operate in Afghanistan. If the common military victory is in the center of such efforts, the German government must now put the cards on the table. But then it should not pretend in the ninth year of the mission that it is primarily interested in reconstruction, stabilization and a democratization of Afghanistan, however it may appear."

Financial Times Deutschland (2/23) opined under the headline: "The Fairy Tale of a Clean War," that "the reality check for the new NATO strategy is under way.... But the attack from Sunday makes it clear that, despite strict rules for the use of the air force, mistakes can happen. The fact that this reality check has thus far failed does not mean that the NATO strategy is basically wrong...but each killed civilian reminds us that a war is going on in Afghanistan and this cannot be embellished with nice words. During an attack in Afghanistan, no one can be sure at whom he fires. Our opponents do not wear uniform and cannot be distinguished from ordinary farmers. To demand soldiers to accept every risk in order to avoid jeopardizing innocent people would be totally out of proportion. There is no clean war even if politicians and their supreme commanders want it."

15. (Turkey) Arrest of Senior Military Officers

The arrest of high-ranking military officers is reported all over the press and one daily carried an editorial. Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/23) carried a correspondent report under the headline: "Ex-Commanders Arrested," and wrote: "This action is only the last strike in a number of police actions and activities of Istanbul's Prosecutor's Office against a formerly untouchable armed force. It follows the revelation of several plans for a coup that date back to the time when Premier Erdogan and his AKP took power in 2002."

Handelsblatt (2/23) carried an AFP/Reuters report under the headline: "Ex-Military Leaders in Turkey arrested under the Suspicion of Having Planned a Coup." Tagesspiegel headlined; "Ex-Generals in Turkey Arrested," and wrote: "In Turkey, the investigations because of alleged preparations for a coup have reached their peak. At the order of Istanbul's Prosecutor's Office, police arrested 50 active and retired soldiers."

Under the headline: "Operation Sledgehammer," Financial Times Deutschland (2/23) carried a front-page report, saying: "The plot, which Turkish police is now supposed to have uncovered, was called 'Operation Sledgehammer.' Security agencies have now arrested a number of high-ranking military officials under the suspicion of having planned a large-scale plot. Turkey has a long-term experience

with military coups. Again and again civil governments were ousted by the military. The armed forces acted like a state in a state in which independent structures and loyalties were valid. With its pro-European course and its far-reaching reform policy, the Islamic AKP governing party has gained support among the Turks, but, at the same time, it has stirred up the hostilities among the nationalists. Fear remains in the liberal camp that a coup attempt could succeed some day in the future."

In an editorial, Tagesspiegel (2/23) argued under the headline "Turkey's Military Under Pressure," that Turkey is about to reprocess one of the most difficult chapters of its most recent history: the intervention of the military in politics. On Monday, police arrested 50 soldiers...and a few years ago, such an activity would have been unthinkable. But the EU process has changed the country. The military must accept that the times are over when they were able to push an unpleasant government out of power. If Turkey is able to demonstrate that it is able to politically deprive the

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military of power by relying on the rule of law, democracy in Turkey will have made a great leap forward."

Die Welt (2/23) carried a lengthy editorial under the headline: "The Netherlands As a Domino," and opined: "Progress in the heavily fought regions in Afghanistan has shown that NATO, but primarily U.S. forces, could succeed in turning the tables in Afghanistan. The greatest factor of insecurity, however, is the political public in the various NATO countries. The ouster of the Dutch government is the most concrete example that the fight for public opinion with respect to Afghanistan seems to have been lost in the majority of European states.... If no one succeeds in stopping this populist trend, the allies will not only lose the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan but also at the home front. And if the Dutch leave, other countries could follow like dominos. How should the Belgian, Italian, British or German governments explain to their citizens that one has to stay in Afghanistan if other partners already bade farewell? It is true that a similar war weariness exists in the U.S., but the political elite are willing to pursue strategic goals with perseverance and resolve, unlike the elites in Europe. This is also the real reason why America is still a global power, while Europe, with a larger number of people and its economic power is a dwarf as far as power politics is concerned. That is why it is more than a domestic affair whether the Netherlands will stay in Afghanistan or not. Europe as a whole is now facing a test. If The Hague leaves the coalition and others follow suit, Europe's suitability as a U.S. strategic partner will be in question, as will be the meaning of NATO."

16. (Dubai) Israel Criticized Over Dubai Killing

Under the headline: "Distraught Helplessness," Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/23) editorialized: "Of course, the Europeans are right when they condemn the killing in Dubai....but, at the same time, the EU is demonstrating a distraught helplessness. The reputation of their passports could suffer because the hit squad stole the identity of EU citizens. That is the only thing that comes to the mind of the EU foreign ministers. Europe is now looking for a parallel war theater to hush up the fact that it is losing influence in the Middle East. Jerusalem will shelve the [EU's] declaration because it could be expected. The EU is divided and that is why Israel is taking advantage of it. European foreign policy that was supposed to be so strong after the EU reform is considerably ailing in this matter. But the Europeans must primarily blame themselves for their lack of power in the Middle East. They still have not understood that reconstruction assistance alone is not enough. Only those will get influence in the Middle East who can offer long-term security guarantees."

MURPHY